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ABSTRACT

Although evidence for the existence of multiple careers is limited, the literature of career development, training, and human resource development has predicted that individuals will have many careers as well as jobs across the lifespan, and small-scale studies and trend analysis suggest that individuals may need to plan and prepare for different work roles, responsibilities, and opportunities throughout life. Moves to different career fields may be voluntary or involuntary, and the freedom to make multiple career choices and changes is subject to constraints. The Intelligent Career is a holistic model that views career as a dynamic process that involves these three ways of knowing: (1) knowing-why motivations, interests, values, aptitudes, and the personal meanings ascribed to work experience over time; (2) knowing-how the repertoire of an individuals' skills and expertise; and (3) knowing-whom relationships and networks of personal and work-related support. The evolutionary psychology model, which views career development as an adaptive challenge, also focuses upon selection, or the external forces that govern career opportunities. Among the lists of career management skills required to be prepared for multiple careers are these C.P. Williams identified from research on women in career transition: (1) inner resilience confidence, self-reliance, planfulness, initiative; (2) career enhancement knowledge, skills, interpersonal competence, flexibility, savvy; (3) quality of life balance, coping, self-care; and (4) the big picture awareness of opportunities, creativity, leadership. (A bibliography listing 12 publications and 3 World Wide Web sties constitutes approximately 20% of this document.) (MO)

**Preparing for Multiple Careers
Practice Application Brief No. 29**

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Preparing for Multiple Careers

Futurists have been predicting that individuals will have many careers as well as jobs across the lifespan. These predictions have acquired the aura of truth as they are repeated in the literature of career development, training, and human resource development. Evidence for the existence of multiple careers is limited (Mallon 1999), but small-scale studies of the phenomenon and trend analysis suggest that individuals may need to plan and prepare for different work roles, responsibilities, and opportunities throughout life. This Brief looks at some of the evidence and new models and theories of careers. It identifies the career management skills needed to make transitions across career fields.

Who Has Multiple Careers?

The impetus to move to a related or radically different career field may be voluntary or involuntary; factors include difficulty finding relevant work, dissatisfaction with the initial career choice, job loss, or the desire to use other skills or interests, to express emerging or submerged identities, or to change one's lifestyle (Nicholson 2000). Evidence of the extent of multiple career changes is difficult to find. The Bureau of Labor Statistics provides data on median number of years with an employer but not on changes of career fields. Teixeira and Gomes (2000) state that "studies in the United States at the end of the seventies already showed that between 10 and 30 percent of the economically active population had experienced at least one career change in a 5-year period" (p. 78). Of 91 skilled young adults in Germany, only one-third had continuous careers in the first 8 years after graduation and over half were employed in other occupations at least once (Heinz 2002). The phenomenon of reverse transfer provides an indirect clue: Townsend (2003) found that 62% of bachelor's-degree holders who enroll in community colleges were seeking an associate degree or certificate in order to make a career change.

Although the predictions imply that everyone will have them, the freedom to make multiple career choices and changes is subject to constraints such as socioeconomic background, gender, age, and the nature of the opportunity structure (Heinz 2002; Mallon 1999; Miller 1999). Some argue that the concept of "career" is relevant only for the privileged or professional classes (Mallon 1999; Miller 1999). For example, Duffield and Franks' (2002) study of nurses who changed careers concluded that "moving to another career or position is a natural behavior of highly skilled and educationally motivated professionals who require ongoing stimulation and diversity in their professional lives" (p. 606). In contrast, Arthur and Rousseau (1996) advocate new, more encompassing definitions of "career" and "transition":

Career. *Old meaning:* a course of professional advancement; usage restricted to occupations with formal hierarchical progression, such as managers and professionals. *New meaning:* the unfolding sequence of any person's work experiences over time. (p. 30)

Transition. *Old meaning:* The movement between states. *New meaning:* The now prevailing cycles of change and adaptation, including stages of preparation, encounter, adjustment, stabilization, and renewed preparation. (p. 34)

New Career Models

From research on career changers, new theories and models are emerging that depict the complex processes involved in multiple careers. The Intelligent Career is one framework that incorporates the often neglected subjective dimension of careers. This holistic model recognizes how people enact values, beliefs, and identity through careers (Parker 2002; Parker and Arthur 2002). Developed with data from MBA gradu-

ates, the model and the Intelligent Career Card Sort® have been validated through factor analysis and subsequent testing with other populations (ibid.). The model views career as a dynamic process that involves three ways of knowing: knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom. Each of these dimensions is reflected in other research on career change.

Knowing-why involves understanding why we work—our motivations, interests, values, aptitudes, and the personal meanings ascribed to work experiences over time. It includes attitudes toward family, community, and other nonwork aspects that affect careers. Knowing-why is reflected in Teixeira and Gomes' (2000) study of seven professionals who made at least one significant career change. Drivers of their changes included dissatisfaction with their initial choice or discontent with the impact of work on other parts of life. They saw career change as a new way to express themselves in the world, to reinterpret or reconstruct identity. Their initial career choice, often made in adolescence, was not seen as an error but as an expression of personal characteristics and the broader context of their lives at that time. In Mallon's (1999) study of 25 ex-managers now pursuing portfolio careers, those who had made a proactive choice to "go portfolio" based the change on their own value system or a transformed view of the self. Others were "converts" who came to appreciate their new situation; "knowing-why" became a retrospective way of making sense of what may have been an involuntary change.

Knowing-how encompasses the repertoire of an individual's skills and expertise (Parker 2002). Although career change will often necessitate a new set of job-specific skills, individuals also find ways to transfer existing skills. A case study of 70 information technology (IT) professionals who shifted to non-IT business careers found that they expected IT skills to be useful in their new position and were motivated by the need for new challenges posed by the application of existing skills in a new situation (Reich and Kaarst-Brown 1999). Lichtenstein et al. (2002) analyzed the nonlinear career of a woman named Sarah who moved from licensing clerk to office systems technician, supervisor, executive secretary, and human resource professional. The keys to her successful transitions were opportunities to generate new competencies through short-term project assignments and ongoing learning. The goal of this learning was "the long-term accumulation of skills and experience, rather than an individual approach to a particular job or task. In this sense, every career experience provides some 'transferable skills' that can build up and be leveraged over time" (p. 43).

McMahon, Patton, and Tatham (2003) point out another aspect of knowing-how: meta-competencies such as learning, life management, and communication skills transferable across life and work contexts. The purpose of such life/career management skills is to enable transitions among work, learning, and other life roles. They include both content learning (self-knowledge, world of work knowledge, job-specific skills) and process learning (life/career planning, decision making).

Knowing-whom involves relationships and networks of personal and work-related support (Parker 2002). Higgins (2001) investigated the social context of the career change decisions of 136 business graduates. Findings reveal two types of support that have different effects on career change. The greater the diversity among providers of *instrumental* support (exposure, visibility, information, coaching) in an individual's network, the greater the likelihood of career change. Diversity in the network of *psychosocial* support was related to confidence in one's ability to overcome career obstacles. Higgins speculated that broad, diverse networks of relationships may increase cognitive flexibility and thus influence new ways of thinking about careers.

Knowing-whom can be either a constraint or a help in career change. Three-quarters of the IT professionals who shifted to business careers (Reich and Kaarst-Brown 1999) reported that informal mentors or sponsors helped them adjust to the new job. Although bachelor's degree holders who enrolled in community college were motivated by desire for career change, the dominant factor in their choice of institution was location, being tied to the local community because of family or work (Townsend 2003). In Lichtenstein et al.'s (2002) case study, mentors played a role in creating trigger points for Sarah's career changes, yet two supervisors hindered her success by denying her project opportunities.

An Alternative Perspective

Another way of looking at careers is Nicholson's (2000) evolutionary psychology model, which views career development as an adaptive challenge. Two of its elements are similar to Intelligent Career: *Motivation* (innate goals, temperament, abilities, aptitudes, cognitive styles) and *Connection* (social network dynamics through which individuals reconcile motivations and opportunity structures). However, the third element, *Selection*, takes into account external forces that govern career opportunities: (divisions of labor, rules for competition, normative values). Nicholson's research revealed four categories of career changers: (1) those who lack impeding circumstances, who are exploring careers to find a match with their Motivation; (2) lifelong explorers, motivated by restless, entrepreneurial interests, and risk taking (a small proportion of the population); (3) those displaced by Selection forces; and (4) the largest group—those in changing environments who jump before being pushed (Selection driven) or whose careers have plateaued so they seek enhanced Connection. Nicholson argues that the "multiple career" discourse largely derives from the experiences of fluid industries such as consulting and media, concluding that his model "suggests that, for all but a tiny minority, careers will continue to be heavily bounded by needs, structures, and opportunities" (p. 70). Miller (1999) also stresses that selection forces governing the opportunity structure have a profound effect on career aspirations, arguing against the myth that "all one has to do is discover one's personal attributes and then an occupation will open itself up for lifelong personal expression" (p. 12). These counterpoints suggest that assumptions about multiple careers must be tempered by recognition that individuals experience differing social, economic, and political realities depending on their context.

Developing Career Management Skills

What skills and dispositions are needed to be prepared for multiple careers? Using the Intelligent Career framework, knowing-why skills include self-knowledge (identification of passions, strengths, abilities, motivations), knowledge of the broader market for one's competencies, the emotional capacity to deal with uncertainty, and realistic expectations (Arthur and Rousseau 1996; Mallon 1999; Higgins 1999). Parker (2002) suggests such techniques as interest and values clarification instruments, the Myers Briggs Type Inventory, and the Intelligent Career Card Sort® to deepen self-knowledge.

Knowing-how involves analyzing skills and abilities to determine what is transferable and leveraging competencies—using current strengths to help you become good at something new (Arthur and Rousseau 1996). For example, career-changing nurses (Duffield and Franks 2002) recognized that they had these transferable skills—communication/interpersonal, organization, professionalism, teamwork, synthesis/analysis, versatility—and practitioners working with them took the approach that "here's what else nursing prepares you for." Techniques such as aptitude tests, job analysis, and review of performance appraisals can help identify transferable skills (Parker 2002).

Knowing-whom requires network-building skills, thinking "outside the box" to improve the density and range of one's networks (Higgins 2001). Finding mentors in the new field or industry is helpful (Lichtenstein et al. 2002; Reich and Kaarst-Brown 1999). Arthur and Rousseau (1996) suggest broadening accountability—beyond a job

description, industry, or field; accountability to family is also included. A hub-and-spoke network map (Parker 2002) is a technique to help identify network strengths and gaps.

Williams' (2000) research on women in career transition identified four key challenges in today's workplace: (1) acknowledging and capitalizing on personal resilience, (2) creating opportunities to demonstrate skills, (3) shaping a personal life that is alive and nourishing, and (4) continuing to move toward a vision of one's best and brightest self. Her model of the qualities needed to address these challenges summarizes the skills required to be prepared for multiple careers:

1. *Inner Resilience* (confidence, self-reliance, planfulness, initiative)
2. *Career Enhancement* (knowledge, skills, interpersonal competence, flexibility, savvy)
3. *Quality of Life* (balance, coping, self-care)
4. *The Big Picture* (awareness of opportunities, creativity, leadership)

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